

# Zimmerwaldites and their American Prototypes

By Alexander Stoklitsky

A thorough study of the international labor movement can leave no doubt in the mind of the student that questions of organization cannot be separated from political and theoretical questions.

In 1903 the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party split into bolsheviks and mensheviks. At that time it was thought by many that the split was the result of mere insignificant tactical controversies. No one then saw how inseparable from and dependent are questions of tactics and forms of organization upon theories and principles. It remained for history, our best teacher, to prove it. And the history of the revolutionary struggle in Russia since that split has proved that we cannot and must not separate these questions.

The persistent policy pursued by the German Social-Democracy to ignore organization controversies resulted most disastrously for the revolutionary consciousness of the German proletariat. Franz Mehring, in his open letter to the bolsheviks, gives the following characteristic description of the German Independent Social-Democratic group:

"The Independent Social-Democratic Party lacks the revolutionary energy that will arouse and carry away the proletarian masses. Nothing can be said against its members as individuals. All of them desire the best for the movement. There are efficient people among them. But the party itself was born under an unlucky star."

The same may be said of the Left Wing of the Socialist Party, from whom we split because of their Centrist position at the very first conference held in New York. The split was the direct result of controversies relating to question of organization and tactics, which indicated that the "Left Wingers" at the Conference absolutely lacked that revolutionary energy which is so much needed to arouse and lead the proletarian masses.

"The Independent Social-Democratic Party," continues Mehring, "endeavored all the time to prove that they did not want to split the party, although they had been partly driven out of the party by the government socialists. But the result of this very policy of hesitation, of doing things by halves, was the complete alienation of the masses, because it strengthened the belief that the Independent Social Democracy is responsible for the division in the ranks of Social Democracy".

Do we not hear the same cry here in this country? Do not our "Left Wingers" speak with the lips of the German Independents?

The "Left Wing" uses every possible means to prove that they did not want a split in the party. The "Left Wing" tries to bring tears to the eyes of the membership by pointing to the injustice of the N. E. C. The "Left Wing," whom this same N. E. C. has partly driven out of the party, like the German centrists, wants to force all to run after the party of the traitors. This "Left Wing" (why they still continue to call themselves "Left Wing" is known only to them) possesses so little vision that it can not see that in its "jump over the impediments" it has almost lost its armor.

In the movement of any country there are weak-spined elements who cannot distinguish black from white. These elements fell into a fit of weeping when the Socialist Party split into Rights and Lefts. They became hysterical when they found that the "Left Wing" had also split into communists and centrists.

These elements would like to make peace between the various groups into which the Socialist Party has split. They are those, who under other conditions, are the peace-makers between the wage slaves and the capitalist class.

When the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party split, the Russian conciliators shouted at the top of their voices: Does it pay to divide the organized ranks of the workers for such fiddle-faddle controversies? Is it right to split the party because of a difference of opinion as to the question of membership or of how to build the party?

The peace-makers of America ape their Russian brethren—the mensheviks. With tears in their eyes and sobbing voices they turn to the builders of the communist party in America and bawl: You left the majority delegates at the Left Wing Conference only because you did not want to wait two months longer. You split because of nonsensical tactical differences.

An old, familiar song, indeed!

No; the unwillingness to wait two months longer is not the cause of the split in the Left Wing, though it is high time to understand that in critical times, when the old is breaking down to make room for the construction of a new movement, two months may mean as much as two years in normal, peaceful times. We split from that many-colored, unprincipled, mixed company of the "Left Wing" because we decided once for all to break with the party of the American social traitors, the Socialist Party, and also with the American prototypes of the German Independents. Among the Majority delegates we found brethren of the Zimmerwaldites whose mental cowardice repulsed the revolutionary and creative forces of the class consciousness proletarians.

Comrade Lenin, in his article "The Crisis in the Zimmerwald International" says: "The Zimmerwald International assumed from the very first a hesitating, Kautsky-like 'center' attitude which compelled the Left to stand by itself, to separate itself from the rest and to come forth with its own manifesto." Our "Left Wing" also, from the very opening of the Conference, took the vacillating position of the Center. This forced the communist-left to immediately break away and come forward with the communist call.

"The fatal weakness of the Zimmerwald International, which brought about its fiasco (from a political and intellectual viewpoint it was already a fiasco)," continues Lenin, "was its hesitancy, its lack of decision, when it came to the practical and all-important question of breaking completely with the social-patriots and the social-patriot international headed by Vandervelde and Hysmanns at The Hague."

These very defects we found in the Majority delegates. As the Zimmerwaldites, their American prototypes hesitate and are irresolute in the most important, practical, all-determining question—to completely break away from the traitorous Socialist Party, the party which sent delegates to the Berne Conference.

"We cannot remain with our feet in the Zimmerwald mud," continues Lenin. "There is nothing to expect from the Zimmerwald Kautskians, more or less allied with the chauvinistic International of Plekhanov and Scheidemann. We should, however, remain in Zimmerwald for one purpose only, to obtain more information."

Nothing could present a more vivid picture of what took place at the Left Wing Conference than these words of Lenin. If the split at the Left Wing Conference was not caused by the question of the split of the Second International, it was the question of the resolute determination to once and for all leave the American supporters of the Second International—the American Scheideman Party.

In the caucus held by the communist Minority of the Conference we empathically declared that we could no longer work with the "Left Wing" swamp. "We remain with you" we stated openly and frankly to the Majority, "to get all information possible of your proceedings".

This was the only course left to us.

However, our peace-makers give us no rest. "Is it not the fact," they ask us, "that the program you adopted is almost the same as that adopted by the Majority? Hence it is not a question of principle which caused the split. You," they bawl, "left because we want to take part in the convention called by the Socialist Party, in order to win the masses over."

Let us answer this charge in the words of Lenin:

"It is not so much the question of numbers; it is a question of expressing correctly the ideas and policy of the truly revolutionary proletariat. Never mind about 'proclaiming' internationalism; the essential thing is for us to be, even when the times are most trying, real internationalists in our deeds."

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"To wait for international conferences and congresses is simply to betray internationalism. Real international socialists are not allowed to meet at Stockholm" \* \* \*

"Let us not wait, let us at once organize a Third International" \* \* \*

As if in a mirror, the words of Lenin, full of revolutionary meaning, reflect the events in the American movement.

Deep, practical and organization controversies separate us from the prototypes of the "Independents" and "Zimmerwaldists."

These controversies are not accidental. There is no doubt